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Citizen's Guide to the Planning Process

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What Is A Neighborhood Plan?

- A neighborhood plan is a tool for *organizing* and *prioritizing* improvements to your neighborhood. It is a blueprint, developed through public input, that the City and the residents of the neighborhood use in determining which projects and improvements should be carried out, when, and by whom.

- A neighborhood plan demonstrates a high level of organization within the neighborhood, which aids in leveraging funding and attention.

- A neighborhood plan can include various categories of improvements, including physical capital improvements, such as streets, sidewalks and lighting. The plan can also address services such as police, fire safety, code inspection, and sanitation. Land use and zoning are also addressed in the plan. In terms of social improvements, the plan might identify issues such as homelessness, education, and cultural and recreational programs. While this is a sampling, there is no limit to the types of issues that the residents find important to their neighborhood.

- The final neighborhood plan typically consists of:
    Historic overview of the neighborhood
    Existing conditions
    Assets/Needs Assessment
    Vision Statement
    Goals and Objectives
    Action Plan and Timeline
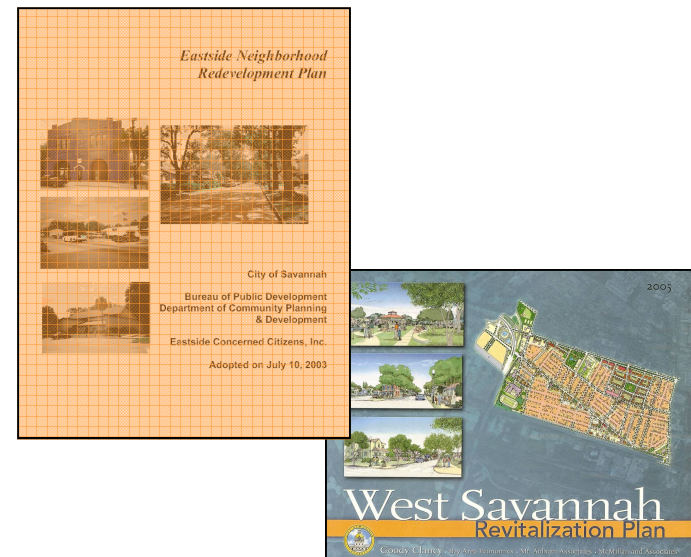
Why Plan?

- Planning enables the residents and the City to consider which types of problems and opportunities face the neighborhood, and to prioritize them.

- This process can have an effect on the allocation of resources, both public and private.

- As a result of community leadership and physical improvements, the neighborhood can experience revitalization and become a better environment in which to live, work, and raise families.

- The planning process brings residents together in a forum that promotes communication and collaboration. The planning process requires a group of people who are dedicated to their neighborhood, and willing to sit through numerous meetings and discussions.

- The process can increase resident cohesion, empower residents, and engender pride.

Through planning for their neighborhoods, residents equip themselves with a better knowledge of city government and how it works. Planning can help improve systems currently being used to deliver service to the citizens of Savannah.

Who Are the Agents for Neighborhood Improvement?

- *Everyone* has the opportunity to make a positive impact on his or her neighborhood.
- **Neighborhood organizations** are one of the most powerful tools of neighborhood improvement, and can act as a stabilizing factor in the neighborhood. They provide organization and a voice for a neighborhood. In addition, they represent the collective memory of a neighborhood, as there are often long time residents.
- **Public officials** can also instigate change both in a neighborhood and on a larger community-wide scale. Based on their involvement and knowledge of the neighborhood issues, public officials can be allies with the neighborhood in promoting positive forces within the neighborhood.
- Because the neighborhood plans are presented for adoption before City Council, they come to the political arena and therefore, can garner a degree of support.
- **Developers** affect change by investing in the neighborhood and providing facilities that the neighborhood needs. This can bolster a neighborhood's economic base. On the other hand, when a developer proposes controversial development, this action can mobilize the neighborhood, forcing the neighborhood to identify its approach to redevelopment, as well as to determine threatened neighborhood assets and aspects of the neighborhood that residents value.
- **Other agents** for change include resources within the neighborhood, such as schools, churches, and social agencies, which provide networks and support systems.
- **Businesses** can also be a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization.

Principles for the Planning Process

Vision:

To improve Savannah's disadvantaged neighborhoods through the planning process. This includes helping neighborhoods identify and pursue the vision for their neighborhood.

To prepare, through broad-based participation, action plans for neighborhoods within the target area;

Goals:

- To develop and maintain stable, healthy, and diverse neighborhoods within the city that are interdependent and interrelated;

- To empower residents of neighborhoods to understand the range of opportunities and problems within their neighborhoods and to use the planning process to better their neighborhoods;

- To encourage the development of strengths, assets, and capacities of neighborhood residents, organizations, and institutions through the planning process; to develop the capacity of residents and organizations to plan for their future and take actions to realize that future;

- To include in the planning process a review of existing conditions, challenges and assets as well as a description of future visions and goals for the neighborhood;

- To provide plan implementation and to partner with other groups and agencies to realize the goals and strategies of the neighborhood plan.

Who's Responsible For What?

The planning process involves a partnership between the City of Savannah and those neighborhoods who are ready to plan and who are dedicated to making the action plan successful. The neighborhood plan is not a task list of capital improvement projects or work plan for the city to implement, nor is it simply a list of "To Dos" for neighborhood residents. It is a mixture of both!

It requires a spirit of partnership and patience to build a plan and to carry it out. Because of the hundreds of energetic residents of Savannah's neighborhoods, fourteen neighborhood plans have been produced since 1991. However, much more work needs to be done to provide neighborhood plans to all Savannah's target area neighborhoods.

The City of Savannah's Responsibilities:
- The City will provide facilitation at all meetings and will record the opinions and input of citizens and members of the neighborhood association at public meetings.
- The City will respect the input of neighborhood residents as the legitimate priorities of the neighborhood, and will reflect these priorities as best it can in its planning or decision-making activities.
- The City will maintain early and open communication with the neighborhoods on issues that may affect them, with particular attention being given to the priorities and issues generated through the planning process.
- The City will provide technical assistance, information, and data to the Neighborhood association throughout the process. This includes communication within City departments to verify feasibility and time frame, where possible, for completing various public improvements.
- The Bureau of Public Development will, to the best of its ability, provide implementation by acting as a catalyst for those components of the action plan incumbent on other city agencies.

The Neighborhood Association's Responsibilities:
- The neighborhood association and the City shall share open communication throughout the planning process regarding problems, issues and areas of concern, and ask for assistance when necessary. The neighborhood association will guide City staff on the development of the plan.
- Neighborhood association members are expected to attend planning meetings and workshops regularly in order to provide input on the array of topics to be discussed.
- The neighborhood association will, throughout the process, in conjunction with the City, inform neighborhood residents about the processes, all work completed and final products.
- The neighborhood association shall be as inclusive as possible throughout the process and shall consider the expression of all viewpoints concerning neighborhood issues, priorities and concerns.
- After the final neighborhood plan has been the made, the neighborhood association, neighborhood group, and residents will work to implement those action steps that were identified as their responsibilities.

The Planning Process: A Short Summary

1) Getting Organized
Time commitment
Recruiting volunteers
Helpful Hints for Getting Organized

2) Creating A Vision
How to Create a Vision Statement
Helpful Hints for Creating a Vision Statement

3) Gathering Information
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4) Setting Goals and Objectives
What Are Goals and Objectives?
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5) Developing your Action Plan
What is an Action Plan?
Helpful Hints for Developing Your Action Plan

6) Adopting the Plan
Who Adopts the Plan?

7) Implementing your Action Plan
Who will carry it out?

The neighborhood planning process can be lengthy; some plans take a year or longer to complete. Therefore, it is important for those involved to understand the steps involved in preparing a plan. The following is a simple guide to provide you with a basic understanding of the process of building a neighborhood plan.

1. GETTING ORGANIZED

Time Commitment
Find members of the association or neighborhood that can devote the necessary time and to actively participate throughout the entire planning process, which may take up to a year to complete.

Recruiting Volunteers
Volunteers can be recruited in a variety of ways including: announcements in the local newspaper, neighborhood newsletters, door-to-door canvassing in the neighborhoods, networking among organizations and residents, and posting invitations to join the planning process in neighborhood stores, shops, and restaurants. The City's Community Planning and Development will assist in posting notices.

It is important that the neighborhood planning process have broad public support and interest and that the citizens of the neighborhood be actively involved in the development of the goals and action plan. This will be essential when the neighborhood plan goes before the City Council for adoption, as well as during the implementation stages. In order to ensure widespread participation by local residents, business persons, institutions and other organizations in the neighborhood throughout the planning process, the neighborhood association and the planning department should consider one or more of the following alternative methods of obtaining citizen input:

- Neighborhood surveys (mail or telephone)
- Newsletter/sector mailings/brochures/flyers/meeting notices
- Individual resident/business person interviews
- Neighborhood-wide meetings
- Workshops
- Media coverage/newspaper articles
- Reserved public speaking time at committee meetings
- Neighborhood "walks"

An initial step in recruiting volunteers for the neighborhood association and in developing community outreach for the planning process should be to inventory the neighborhood's existing resources and key members of the community. This list will help develop innovative methods for identifying potential committee members as well as ensuring community involvement and could include:

- A written inventory of the individual business, association and institutional, and other neighborhood stakeholders;
- A broad list of **community assets** that could be represented, in some manner, on the neighborhood association including representatives of banks, schools, libraries, hospitals, churches, police stations, service organizations, etc.;
- A description of how to bring in outside resources (investors, community groups, businesses, public service groups or agencies, etc.) to support local community outreach programs proposed as part of the planning process.

The Role of Process Facilitators

Because the neighborhood association will shape the neighborhood plan, it is extremely important that those meetings run smoothly and accomplish as much as possible in the limited time available. It is also important to note that City Planning staff are at the meeting to guide the process. Asset and problem identification shall come from the neighbors. Planning staff will try to verify or confirm these issues with data. Planning staff will also present data on issues to spur thought, and will introduce issues that the neighborhood association can then discuss. The problem solving section, which will entail developing an action plan, will be a collaborative effort between city staff and the neighborhood.

Helpful Hints for Getting Organized

- Involve residents from the very beginning before crucial decisions are made.

- Be prepared for each meeting and aware of the meeting mechanics and process being used. Be sensitive to other people's feelings, listen well to all group members and clarify issues and content when needed.

- All neighborhood association members should be aware of the time commitment and responsibility involved with the planning process.

- It may be necessary to spend time at initial meetings doing things just to solidify the group. Identify a chairperson, the location and time for each meeting, who will be responsible for the agenda, minutes, voting process.

- Don't take public awareness for granted. Throughout the process, use all available communication tools to explain and promote the process, including free publicity. Use special events to promote the process: public forums, guest speakers at cultural, arts, and school activities, etc.

2. CREATING A VISION

A vision is a statement of the intended future of the neighborhood and how the neighbors would like the neighborhood to look, feel, and function. This provides a framework for setting goals and objectives for the neighborhood plan.

The visioning process motivates the members of the neighborhood to look ahead and to think about the possibilities for the future of the neighborhood. The product of the visioning process is a statement composed of one or more sentences which captures the community's imagination for the possibilities for the neighborhood.

Example: "A neighborhood that is a safe and clean place in which to live, work, visit, and play."

How to Create a Vision Statement (City staff will lead this process).

Consider the following questions:
- What do I see as the best future for my neighborhood?
- How do I want my neighborhood to look in the future?
- What types of residences and businesses will be in the neighborhood?
- What should it be like to live here?
- Summarize the things that people have in common
- Build consensus and then develop the vision statement

Helpful Hints for Creating a Vision Statement
- Be as creative as you would like to be in crafting your vision.
- Focus first and completely on the result of your effort, not yet on the actions to achieve it. State it as if the vision were in the present tense.
- Remain flexible and adaptable to other people's continuing input.
- Remember the vision for your neighborhood throughout the process. It should be your driving force.

> **City of Savannah Vision Statement**
>
> Savannah will be a safe, environmentally healthy, and economically thriving community for all of its citizens.

3. GATHERING INFORMATION

The purpose of this phase is to gather and synthesize information pertaining to the neighborhood, in order to determine needs.
During this phase the following activities will occur:

Gathering Data
City staff will begin to conduct inventories and gather data on topics such as*:
- demographics
- economic development
- housing conditions
- public safety
- traffic patterns
- parks and recreation areas
- land use and zoning
- infrastructure (sidewalks, streets, transportation)
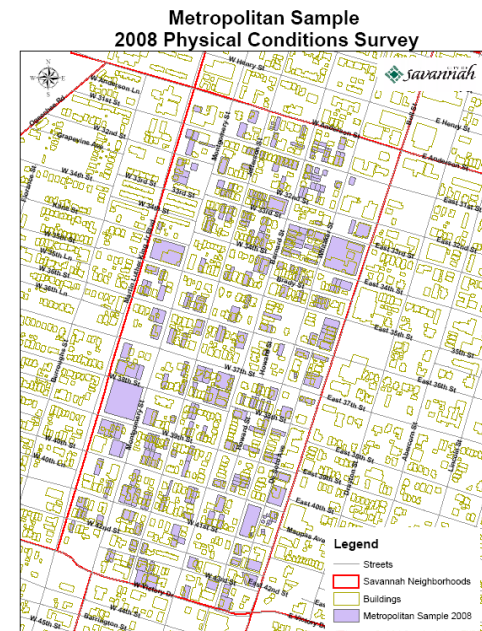 *Other categories are added as needed.

Asset and Issue Identification
The neighborhood association will identify trends affecting the neighborhood.
Trends are both positive and negative perceptions that residents have regarding both opportunities and problems that their neighborhood faces.

Maps will be used to identify specific problem areas, such as locations of traffic problems, substandard sidewalks, dilapidated housing. The issues will be identified as the subjects come before the neighborhood association. For instance, one meeting will be devoted to economic development. This is the time to bring up shortcomings or opportunities within the neighborhood to generate economic development.

The neighborhood association will also determine assets within the neighborhood. These are positive aspects of the neighborhood. This exercise will be used to determine positive factors within the neighborhood and how they can help implement the plan.

Metropolitan Sample
2008 Physical Conditions Survey

Legend
— Streets
— Savannah Neighborhoods
— Buildings
— Metropolitan Sample 2008

Determining Needs

Subareas of the neighborhood that need to be addressed will be identified. This may include commercial corridors or a concentration of vacant buildings or other areas that require special attention. A redevelopment block may be defined if there is sufficient land and an opportunity for it. A redevelopment block is an area such as the Cuyler-Brownsville Redevelopment Block which the City redeveloped with single family, affordable housing. City staff will gather additional data as needed to analyze the issues presented. As a result of this cross reference, needs can then be determined and prioritized. City staff from relevant departments shall attend planning meetings to comment on service their departments are delivering and suitable data.

Map 1. MIDTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD
Location of the Proposed Development Site.

Buildings
Neighborhood Boundary
Proposed Development Site

City staff must consult existing plans that have an impact on the neighborhood. These may include:

- The Savannah-Chatham County Comprehensive Plan
  (2033 Tricentennial Plan)
- Traffic Studies
- Environmental Studies
- Housing and Community Development Plan

Helpful Hints for Gathering Information

- *Before* topics come to the neighborhood association, please take time to consider the relevant issues facing the neighborhood, what their causes are, and what can be done to solve the problem. This will help make the planning meetings more productive.
- Be prepared to help identify locations of specific problems. Keep a writing pad with you to record any observations you may have to present to the neighborhood association.
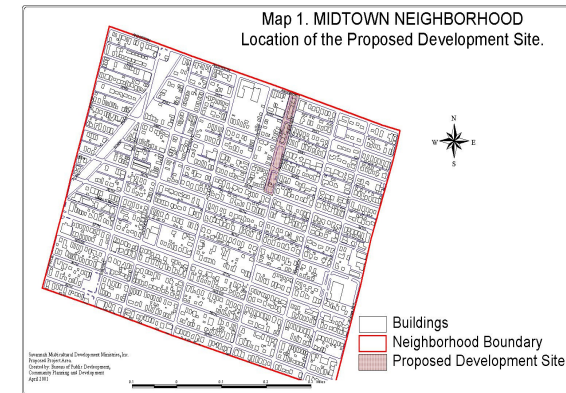
4. SETTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

What Are Goals and Objectives?
Setting goals and objectives requires using the issues and data that have been previously identified to determine ideals or standards for the neighborhood. These goals and objectives should have some type of relationship to the vision for the neighborhood, and should be considered "benchmarks" or "milestones" for progress.

Goals are the long term ends toward which programs and activities are directed.
Objectives are specific, measurable, intermediate ends that are achievable and mark progress toward a goal.

Goals are	Objectives are
Broad	Narrow
General	Precise
Intangible	Tangible
Abstract	Concrete
Cannot be measured	Can be measured

Example:

Goal: "To make the neighborhood free of crime and drugs."

Objective: "Decrease the number of crimes against persons and property by 5% annually."

The number of issues and goals do not necessarily have to be the same. Existing data should be used to prioritize goals and to identify objectives.

Helpful Hints for Settings Goals and Objectives
- Keep the goals and objectives as simple as possible.
- Do not use vague terminology.
- Be prepared to make minor changes to incorporate public comment.
- The goal statements do not have to state how the goals will be met. This will be done in the objectives.
- Make the goals known to the public. This can be done by publishing the goals in the neighborhood newspaper or newsletter or posting the goals in places such as churches and schools.

5. DEVELOPING YOUR ACTION PLAN

What is an Action Plan?
The action plan is a series of strategies for meeting the objectives and goals of the plan. The strategies should be as focused as possible. Strategies are specific projects, programs, activities, or tasks that should be completed. It is important that when identifying strategies, that they be strategies that will be able to be achieved. While there is nothing wrong with setting goals high and setting high standards and challenges, the action plan must be able to be implemented.

Example:
Strategy: "Devise a curriculum for programs geared toward after school hours for young teens and weekend activities for senior citizens. These programs could be housed at Lincoln Community Center"

Helpful Hints for Developing Your Action Plan

- Be as specific as possible. Think of each strategy as a statement that contains the specific details not included in the objectives.
- Think of the time frame as a five year plan. Action steps of higher priorities will generally fall within the earlier years of the time frame.
- Be realistic when assigning responsibility to action items. Be prepared to help rally these parties to action. Stagger the strategies such that implementation for each responsible parties is more manageable. For instance, do not assign all of the top priority assignments to one agency to be done all at one time.

*Example***:**

Goal: Increase play space for children in the neighborhood.

Objective: Provide 2 new playgrounds in next 2 years.

Strategies: 1. City Leisure Services, KABOOM!, and Home Depot will partner
                   to build a new playground at Main Street Park in 2011.

                   2. CPD and the Neighborhood Association will build a new play
                   ground at Second Street in 2012, using designated SPLOST funding.

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6. ADOPTING THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Who Adopts the Plan?
Ultimately, the neighborhood plan should be adopted by City Council, so that the plan will be officially endorsed by the City. This will help to give the plan some weight and justification for implementing the action steps in the action plan.

Before the neighborhood plan reaches City Council, it will be sent to multiple departments so they can review it and provide comments to Community Planning and Development. Community Planning and Development will review the comments then send onto the Assistant City Manager for Public Development and then onto the City Manager for review.

The neighborhood association should support the neighborhood plan when it comes before the City Council for adoption.

7. IMPLEMENTING YOUR ACTION PLAN

Implementing or carrying out your action plan is just as important (if not more important) as creating it. The action plan should be a mix of the following types of implementation processes:

- Those that can be implemented by the neighborhood residents themselves, such as home improvement and beautification projects:
- Those that require a joint effort by the neighborhood and the public or private sector, such as publicizing city programs or undertaking studies of sub-areas; or
- Those that are solely taken care of by local government.

Community Planning & Development Target Neighborhoods

CITY OF *savannah*

Neighborhoods shown on map
1. Woodville/Bartow
2. Hudson Hill/Bayview
3. West Savannah
4. Bay Street Viaduct Area
5. Carver Heights
6. Yamacraw Village
7. Kayton/Frazier Area
8. North Historic District
9. South Historic District
10. Beach Institiute
11. Hitch Village/Fred Wessel Homes
12. Eastside
13. Dixon Park
14. East Victorian District
15. West Victorian District
16. Laurel Grove/Railroad Area
17. Cuyler/Brownville
18. Metropolitan
19. Thomas Square
20. Midtown
21. Baldwin Park
22. Live Oak
23. Benjamin Van Clark Park
24. Blackshear
25. Hillcrest Area
26. Winter Gardens/Brightwood
27. Gordonston
28. Twickenham
29. Savannah Gardens
30. Pine Gardens
31. East Savannah
32. Avondale
33. Victory Heights
34. Victory Manor/East Hill/Donwood
35. Sunset Park
36. Dale Terrace/Olympus/Victory Square
37. Parkside
38. Ardsley Park/Chatham Cresent
39. Bingville
40. Cann Park
41. Jackson Park
42. Beach HS Area/Feiler Terrace
43. Ogeecheeton/Dawes Avenue
44. Cloverdale
45. Tremont Park
46. Liberty City/ Summerside
47. Feiler Park/Hussars Terrace/Dittmerville
48. Tatemville
49. Sylvan Terrace
50. Ardmore/Gould Estates/Olin Heights
51. Abercorn Heights/Lamara Heights/Ridgewood
52. Medical Arts
53. South Garden
54. Memorial Hospital/Fairfield
55. Sackville
56. Edgemere
57. Oakland Park/Northgate/Eastgate/Pinehurst
58. Laroche Park/Springhill/Daffin Heights
59. Fernwood/Parkwood
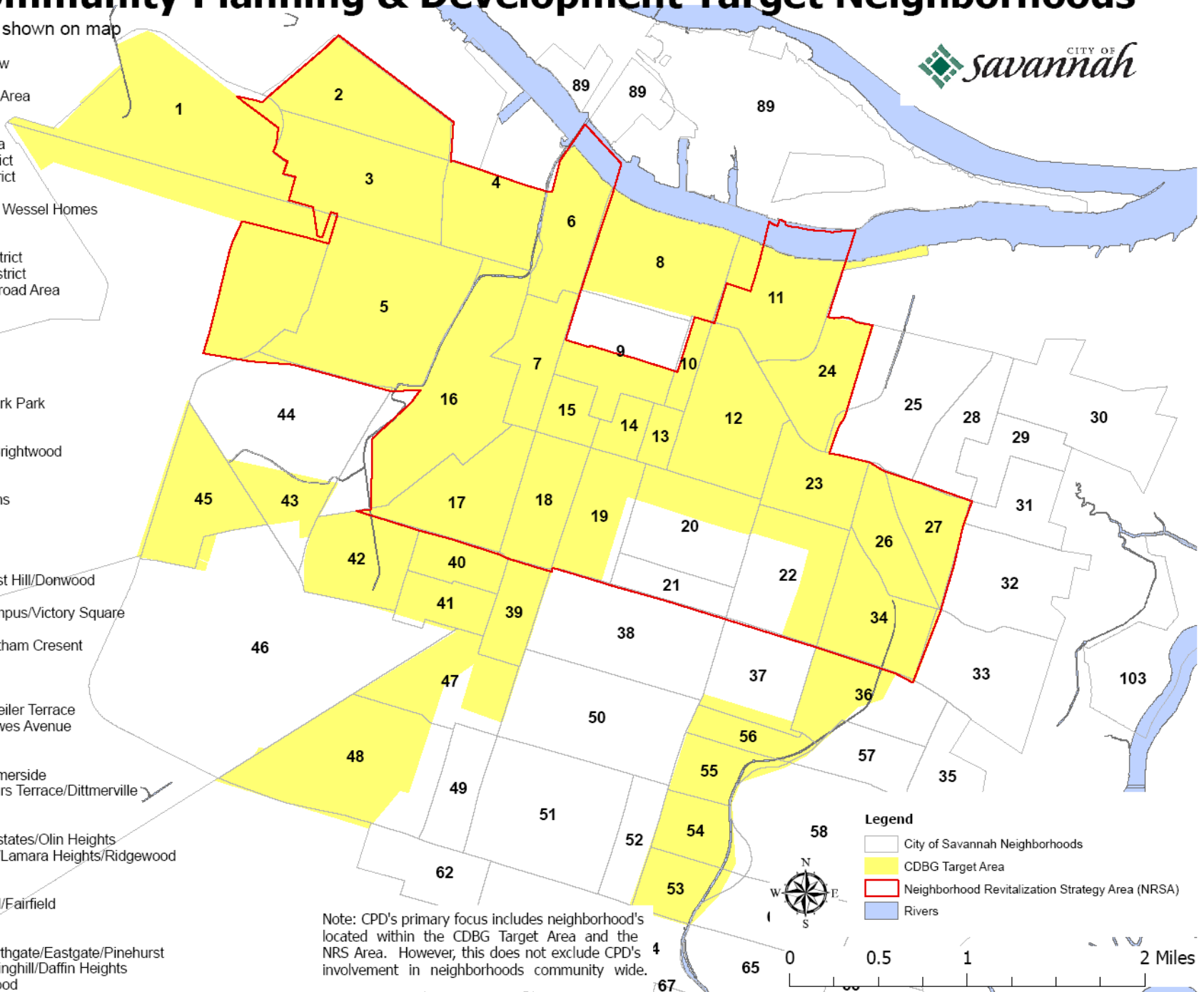
Note: CPD's primary focus includes neighborhood's located within the CDBG Target Area and the NRS Area. However, this does not exclude CPD's involvement in neighborhoods community wide.

Legend
- City of Savannah Neighborhoods
- CDBG Target Area
- Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA)
- Rivers

0   0.5   1   2 Miles